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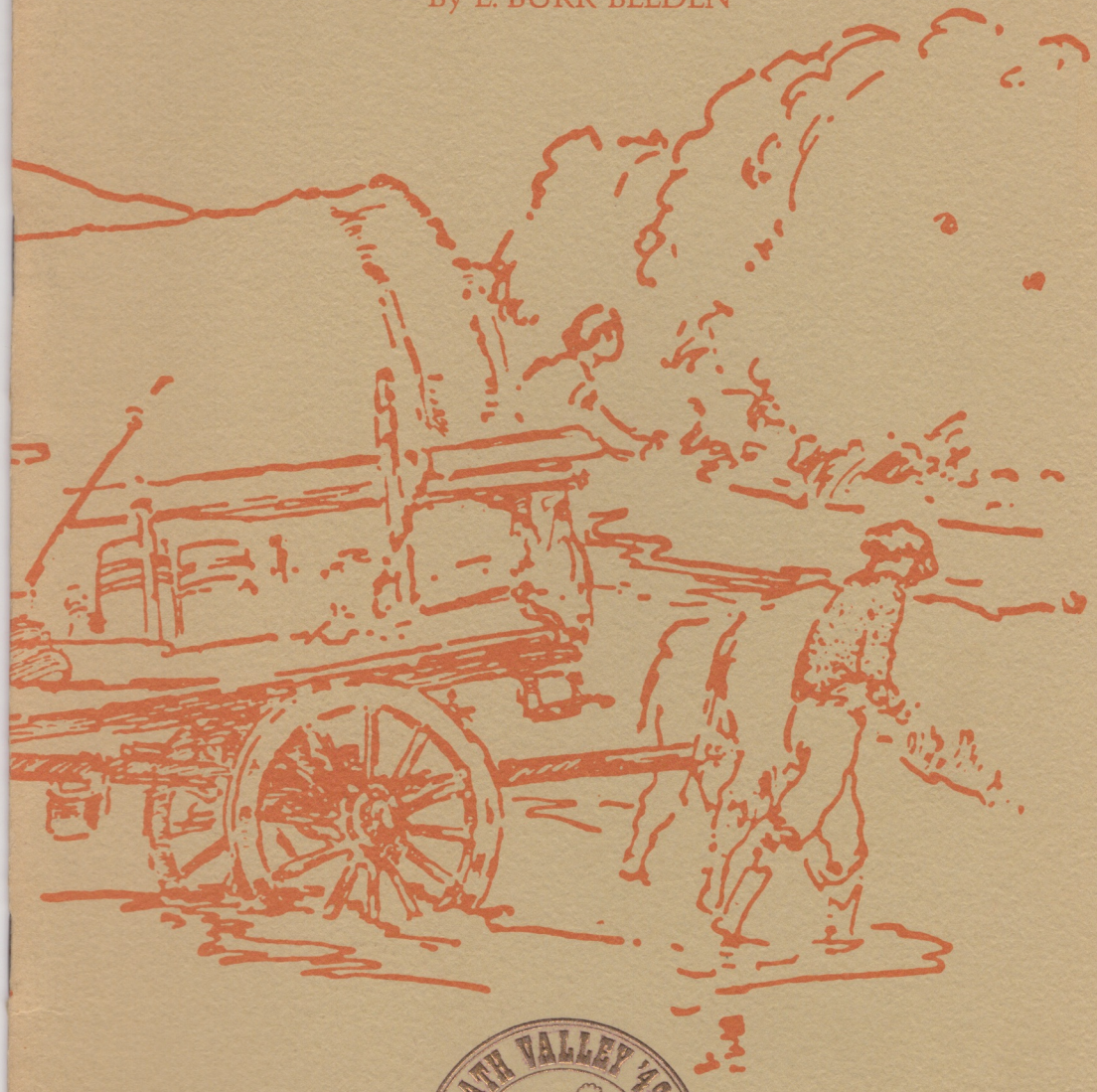
By L. BURR BELDEN



DEATH VALLEY '49ERS

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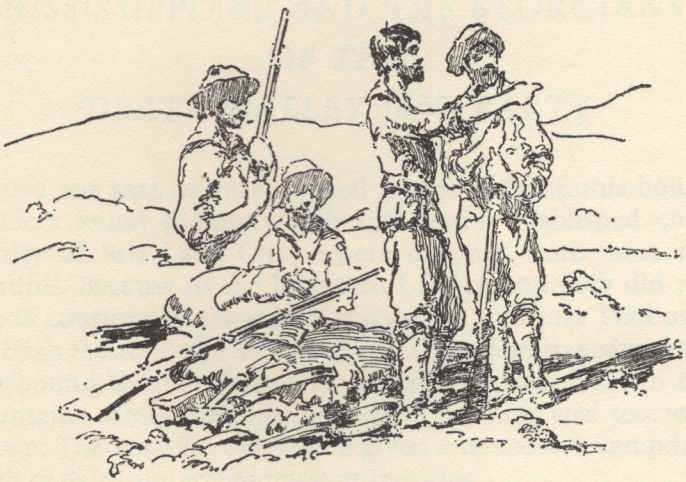

1975

THE DEATH VALLEY FORTY-NINERS: LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

DEDICATED TO

THE MEMORY OF

SYBIL BELDEN

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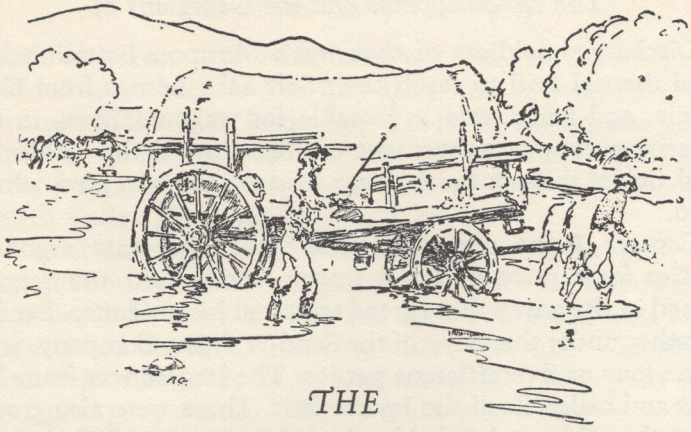


THE MISSISSIPPIANS AND THE GEORGIANS OF THE DEATH VALLEY 1849 PARTY

DURING THE FALL OF 1848, several groups of California-bound travelers found themselves in the newly established community of Salt Lake City, where supplies were none too plentiful. Because of the lateness of the season they did not dare to continue westward via the usual California Trail over the High Sierra to the Sacramento Valley. The tragedy of the snowbound Donner Party which had been marooned in the mountains while attempting such a crossing was too well known. These gold seekers were given a temporary camp just south of Salt Lake by Mormon authorities.

In this camp they were visited by Jefferson D. Hunt, who had been a leader of the Mormon Battalion during the Mexican War. Hunt had made three trips overland between Southern California and Utah over the longer but winter-safe Old Spanish Trail.

The Old Spanish Trail, explored in the larger part by missionary-priests of Spain in the 18th century, had been used annually for pack train commerce between the outpost colonies of New Mexico and California during the decade and a half before the Mexican War.

Discharged soldiers of that war's Mormon Battalion had used the old trail to reach their Salt Lake homes from California, and had found it passable for wagons. Thus, in the feverish westward movement of 1849 toward the California gold fields, this southern route became the accepted winter road.

Captain Hunt offered to guide the desperate argonaut parties for a price of $10 a wagon. More than 100 wagons joined in the group that agreed to accept his guidance. Banded together under the name of the Sand Walking Company, were some four or five different parties. The largest was from Illinois and called itself the Jayhawkers. There were also groups from the midwest headed by Asabel Bennet and J. B. Arcane. Several independent groups of five or six men were also included. There were two closely allied groups, The Georgians and the Mississippians. The Georgians had adopted the name of Bug Smashers.

The groups started out, but near Little Salt Lake were overtaken and passed by a mounted party headed by a man named O. K. Smith. Captain Smith had with him a purported map of a short cut to California, said to have been drawn by the celebrated Indian chief of the Ute horse thieves, Walkara. His possession of this map caused dissension among the travelers. A majority decided to follow the purported short cut and, some two miles east of what is now Enterprise, Utah, left the Hunt leadership to strike directly for California.

They had not gone very many miles before they encountered a long series of rocky bluffs on the eastern side of Beaver Dam Wash. All were stranded. Captain Smith and his horsemen disappeared down a steep canyon where wagons could not follow. The group named the point of Smith's departure Mt. Misery. A short time later a canyon was found down which wagons could be drawn. By the time the wagons reached the bottom of the broad wash Smith had vanished.

After leaving Mt. Misery the Jayhawkers took a somewhat more northerly route west than did the Bennett-Arcane-Manly Party. Twenty-eight wagons continued west, but the bulk of the caravan had had enough of short cuts and turned

south whenever a favorable route was reached. Several parties decided to go back to join Captain Hunt. Among those who returned to the Hunt leadership was H. W. Bigler, who carved his name on the rocky wall of Beaver Dam Wash, where it has been preserved to the present time and visited by several Death Valley Forty-niners.

The remaining dissenters continued along the path they thought Smith had taken, crossed the southern Nevada desert near the little town of Hiko and then continued west to the approximate location of Beatty, where they turned south and entered Death Valley by various routes. The Georgians chose a rougher path west of Hiko by what is now known as Forty-mile Canyon, then turned south and were forced to abandon their wagons at what was later known as Big Dune on the Tonopah-Tidewater Railroad. The Mississippians crossed the Southern Nevada desert south of the Georgians by a better route. They reached Devil's Hole, east of Death Valley Junction, and then turned west down Furnace Creek Wash. About two miles from the junction they were forced to abandon their wagons. Both parties after leaving their wagons continued on foot with some supplies packed on the backs of surviving oxen.

The spot where the Mississippians left their wagons is now known as Lost Wagons. After being given the surplus cattle of the Mississippians, the Reverend J. W. Brier, their chaplain, left with his family to rejoin the Jayhawkers who had preceded them down a canyon dividing the eastern rampart of Death Valley. It was a route somewhat longer than the one directly west used by the Mississippians but it was not too difficult for wagons.

The trek across the Armagosa Desert was vividly told 53 years later by Mrs. Juliet Brier in an interview with a San Francisco newspaper writer. She recalled:

"We reached the top of the divide between Death and Ash valleys and, oh, what a desolate country we looked down onto. The next morning we started down. The men said they could see what looked like springs in the valley. Mr. Brier was always ahead to explore and find water, so I was left with our

Furnace Creek wash taken from the southeast side of wash — looking across it toward Death Valley and the Panamints. The emigrants went from left to right across the picture as they descended into Death Valley.

Salt Creek is the outflow of McClean Spring.

Devil's Corn Field lies between McClean Spring and the approaches to Towne's Pass and Emigrant Wash. The Panamint Range is on the skyline in this picture.

Panamint Valley from the mouth of Wildrose Canyon, with the Argus Range on the skyline.

Photographs courtesy of Death Valley National Monument.

WILLIAM LEWIS MANLY MAP

Showing the Trail the Emigrants Travelled From Salt Lake to San Bernardine in 1849
11 Mount Misery here the first death occurs
Figs 2 on Bennetts Arcanes Trail
do 3 on Jayhawkers Trail
do 4 where Culverwell Died (33) feet below the Sea
do 5 where Bennetts arcanes & their families Comforts
do 6 " Sham Died (while Manly & Hope went for help
" 7 " Fish do
" 8 " Robinson do
9 Mountain Meadows
Salt Lake City
Salt Lake
Desert
American
Utah Lake
Little Salt Lake
Spanish Trail to Salt Lake
Dry Lake
Dry Lake
Provo River
Warm Spring
Lake
Bitter
Water
Amiquis Creek
Where Jayhawkers Camp Burnt the Wagons
Salt Lake
Death
Valley

National Park Service.

three boys to help bring up the cattle. They expected to reach the springs in a few hours and the men pushed ahead. I was sick and weary and the hope of a good camping place was all that kept me up. Poor little Kirke gave out and I carried him on my back, barely seeing where I was going until he would say, 'Mother, I can walk now.' Poor little fellow. He would stumble on a little way over the salty marsh and sink down crying. . . . Thus we staggered over the salty wastes. About midnight we came around a big rock and there was my husband at a small fire. 'Is this the camp?' I asked. 'No, it's six miles farther,' he said. I was ready to drop and Kirke was almost unconscious, moaning for a drink. Mr. Brier took him on his back and hastened to camp to save his little life. It was 3 o'clock Christmas morning when we reached the springs. I only wanted to sleep but my husband said I must eat and drink or I would never wake up. . . . We found hot and cold springs there and scrubbed and rested. That was a Christmas none could ever forget.

"Music and singing? My no! We were too far gone for that. Nobody spoke very much. . . . The men killed an ox and we had a Christmas dinner of fresh meat, black coffee and a little bread. I had one small biscuit. You see we were on short rations then, and didn't know how long we would have to make provisions last. We didn't know we were in California. Nobody knew what untold misery the morrow might bring. . . . Fred Carr said to me that night, 'Don't you think you and the children better remain here and let me send back for you?' I knew what was on his mind. 'No,' I said, 'I have never been a hindrance. I have never kept the company waiting, neither have my children, and every step I take will be towards California.' Then I was troubled no more.

"As men gathered around their blazing campfire they asked Mr. Brier to speak to them — to remind them of home — though they were thinking of home fast enough anyway. So he made them a speech. It was a solemn gathering in a strange place."

When the Briers camped at Travertine Spring the Jayhawkers were two days ahead — but were as yet unable to find a way out.

On December 28 the Georgians, or Bug Smashers, arrived. They camped overnight and continued to Emigrant Wash to cross what is since known as Towne's Pass.

The Mississippians, after leaving the Jayhawkers' camp at what is known as McLean Spring, followed the Georgians up Emigrant Wash. Near LeMoigne Canyon one of their number picked up a piece of silver float which he later had made into a sight for his gun. This incident is the basis for the later exaggerated stories about the Lost Gunsight Lode.

The Jayhawkers meanwhile had turned up Emigrant Wash, left by Hawker Canyon and reached Panamint Valley by way of lower Wildrose Canyon. After reaching the top of Towne's Pass most of the Georgians continued west across the Panamint Valley and the Argus Range to the vicinity of the present Darwin and then made their way to Walker Pass and up the San Joaquin Valley to the Gold Country. The Mississippians split. Captain Towne left the Brier camp near the mouth of Wildrose Canyon to cross the Panamint Valley and later joined with the Georgians. Some other members of the Mississippians joined with the Jayhawkers and eventually reached the gold fields by way of Los Angeles.

It is an odd thing that there is a reasonably complete census of the larger Jayhawker Party but very scanty information of the makeup of either the Georgians or Mississippians. It is known that Captain Towne headed the Georgians and that a Captain Martin led the Mississippians.

Near the mouth of Wildrose Canyon where Captain Towne and the few companions met with the Briers and Jayhawkers, some of the groups had a little flour left which they persuaded Juliet Brier to cook into biscuits. They took three biscuits on the trip west but left three, one for each of the little Brier boys.

Then Captain Towne and his companions left to join the main party of the Georgians and the Mississippians, crossing Panamint Valley and ascending Shepherd Canyon to the vicinity of Darwin. From there they trekked down the east face of the Sierra to Walker Pass, which they traversed to the San Joaquin Valley en route to the gold fields. Some of the Mississippians stayed with the Jayhawkers and continued on

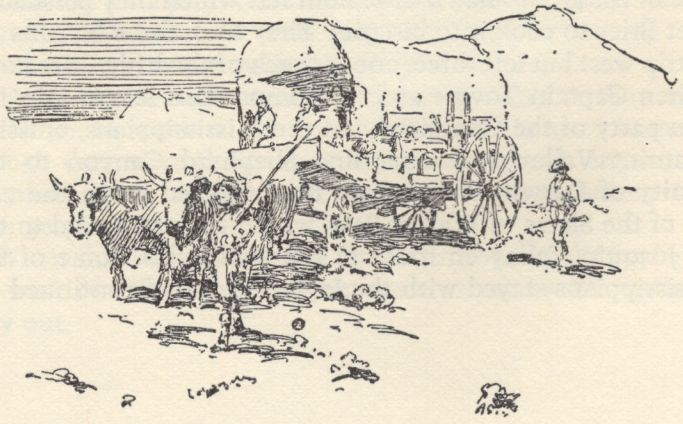
to eventually reach Los Angeles. Most of the Georgians ran into an Indian ambush and were slain at Chowchilla.

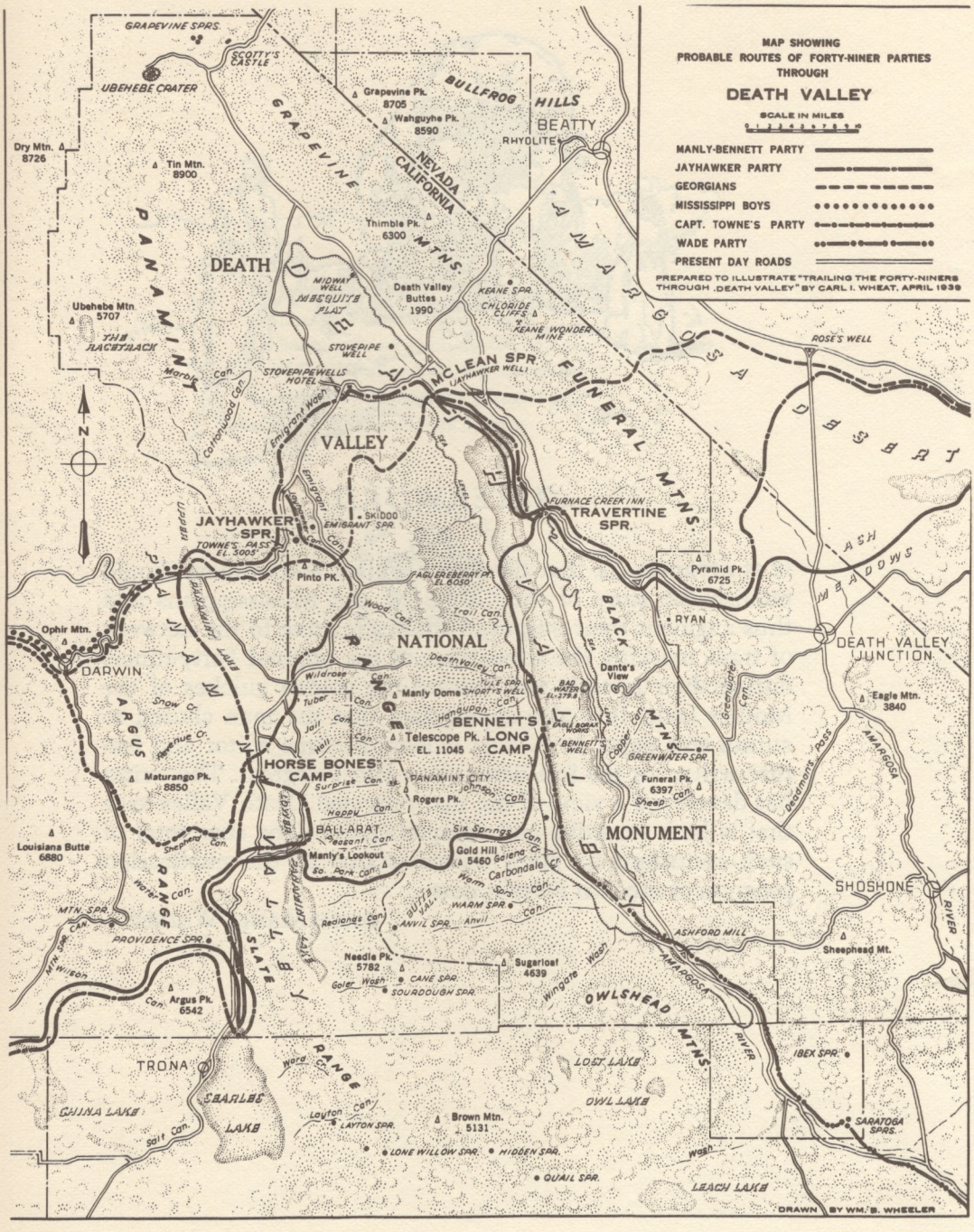
There is no known record of the fate of either Captain Martin or Captain Towne. The Manly-Bennett party and the Jayhawkers are chronicled in the subsequent writings of Manly, Rogers, Stevens, and others, but there are no known accounts by members of the Mississippians or Georgians.

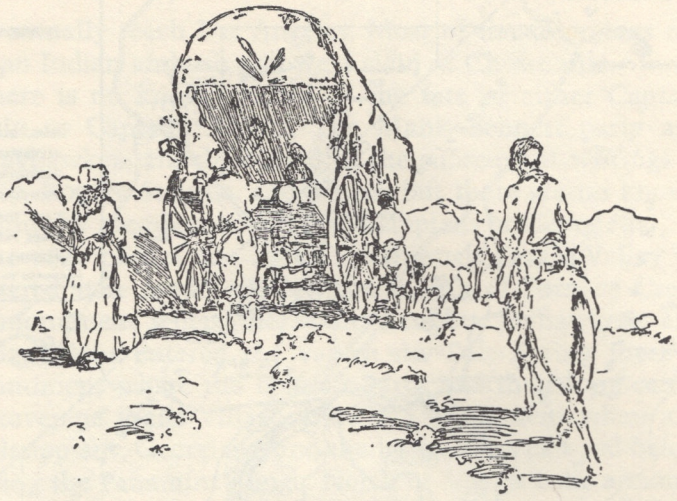
The 1849 parties can be traced through Death Valley by registered state landmarks. At the mouth of Furnace Creek is a monument where the Manly-Bennett, Jayhawkers, and Mississippians entered the valley. At Tule Spring there is a monument where the Bennett Party had their long camp. At Stovepipe Wells Village there is a monument where the Mississippians, Georgians, and the Jayhawkers camped before crossing the Panamint Range. North of Searles Lake a monument marks the spot where the Jayhawkers turned west through China Lake Valley. At Indian Wells another marker traces their course. A short distance south, another monument marks where the Georgians and part of the Mississippians turned through Walker Pass.

Near Castaic Junction a marker points out the site of the San Francisco Ranch. Here, the emaciated argonauts were welcomed and fed by the occupants of the del Valle adobe, otherwise known as San Francisco Rancho Asistancia, enabling them to continue their trek to Los Angeles.*

*The San Fernando Mission Asistancia became the first del Valle Rancho home, although resentment by the Indians made it unusable for a time. This is the building approached by Manly and Rogers in the Death Valley '49 Saga.




MAP SHOWING
PROBABLE ROUTES OF FORTY-NINER PARTIES
THROUGH
DEATH VALLEY
SCALE IN MILES
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
MANLY-BENNETT PARTY
JAYHAWKER PARTY
GEORGIANS
MISSISSIPPI BOYS
CAPT. TOWNE'S PARTY
WADE PARTY
PRESENT DAY ROADS
PREPARED TO ILLUSTRATE "TRAILING THE FORTY-NINERS THROUGH DEATH VALLEY" BY CARL I. WHEAT, APRIL 1938
GRAPEVINE SPRS.
SCOTTY'S CASTLE
UBEHEBE CRATER
Grapevine Pk. 8705
Wahguyhe Pk. 8590
BULLFROG HILLS
BEATTY
RHYOLITE
Dry Mtn. 8726
Tin Mtn. 8900
GRAPEVINE MTNS.
NEVADA
CALIFORNIA
Thimble Pk. 6300
PANAMINT MTNS.
DEATH VALLEY
MIDWAY WELL
MESQUITE FLAT
Death Valley Buttes 1990
KEANE SPR.
CHLORIDE CLIFFS
KEANE WONDER MINE
Ubehebe Mtn. 5707
THE RACETRACK
STOVEPIPE WELL
ROSE'S WELL
Marble Can.
STOVEPIPE WELLS HOTEL
Cottonwood Can.
Emigrant Wash
McLEAN SPR.
JAYHAWKER WELL
FUNERAL MTNS.
AMARGOSA DESERT
VALLEY
SALT CREEK HILLS
LEVEL
JAYHAWKER SPR.
SKIDOO EMIGRANT SPR.
Emigrant Can.
TOWNE'S PASS EL. 3005'
FURNACE CREEK INN
TRAVERTINE SPR.
Pinto Pk.
EAGLE BENCH PT. EL. 6050'
Pyramid Pk. 6725
ASH MEADOWS
Wood Can.
Trail Can.
NATIONAL
Death Valley Can.
BLACK MTNS.
RYAN
Ophir Mtn.
DARWIN
Wildrose
Manly Dome
TULE SPR.
SHORTY'S WELL
BAD WATER EL. -279.8
Dante's View
DEATH VALLEY JUNCTION
Eagle Mtn. 3840
Tuber Can.
Jail Can.
Hall Can.
Hanaupah
BENNETT'S
Telescope Pk. EL. 11045
LONG CAMP
EAGLE BORAX WORKS
BENNETT'S WELL
Cooper Can.
Greenwater Can.
GREENWATER SPR.
Funeral Pk. 6397
Deadmans Pass
AMARGOSA
Maturango Pk. 8850
HORSE BONES CAMP
Surprise Can.
PANAMINT CITY
Johnson Can.
Rogers Pk.
Happy Can.
Sheep Can.
Louisiana Butte 6880
BALLARAT
Pleasant Can.
Manly's Lookout
So. Park Can.
Six Springs
Gold Hill 5460
Goler Can.
Carbondale Can.
MONUMENT
SHOSHONE
Water Can.
MTN. SPR.
PROVIDENCE SPR.
SLATE RANGE
SLATE
WARM SPR.
Redlands Can.
ANVIL SPR.
Anvil Can.
ASHFORD MILL
Sheephead Mt.
Needle Pk. 5782
CANE SPR.
Goler Wash
SOURDOUGH SPR.
Sugarloaf 4639
Wingate Wash
OWLSHEAD MTNS.
Argus Pk. 6542
TRONA
Ward Can.
LOST LAKE
IBEX SPR.
SEARLES LAKE
CHINA LAKE
Salt Can.
Layton Can.
LAYTON SPR.
Brown Mtn. 5131'
OWL LAKE
SARATOGA SPRS.
LONE WILLOW SPR.
HIDDEN SPR.
QUAIL SPR.
Wash
LEACH LAKE
DRAWN BY WM. B. WHEELER



AFTERWORD

IT IS APPROPRIATE that the Death Valley Forty-niners should publish the story of the Georgians and Mississippians and thus augment their output of studies relative to the network of trails marking the adventures of the original Forty-niners during their historic trek toward the golden gulches of the Mother Lode. It is also appropriate that the man chosen to author this paper be L. Burr Belden, lifetime editor and feature writer for the San Bernardino *Sun-Telegram*. The writer has developed a view of the many-faceted Death Valley saga that is both sensitive and comprehensive. The sum total of such contributions gives unique status to the publication program of modern Forty-niners.

ARDIS MANLY WALKER

CREDITS

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Photographs on pages 6 and 7 courtesy of Death Valley National Monument.
Map on pages 8 and 9, courtesy National Park Service

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